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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NASSAU 002421

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [BF](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: BISHOP ELLIS RELISHES ROLE AS POLITICAL
'ANNOINTER,' AND WITH GOOD REASON

REF: (A) NASSAU 1066 (B) NASSAU 2056

Classified By: Charge Kay Crawford for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

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SUMMARY
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(1) (U) On December 2, Charge and Political Officer paid courtesy call to hard-to-pin-down, charismatic Bishop Neil Ellis. During the nearly two hour meeting, Ellis described the enterprise his parish has become. He also outlined his role as the local Dixville Notch, New Hampshire of Bahamian politics -- the one visit that all aspiring politicians must make in order to confirm their legitimacy. Ellis has come far, from a humble background, mentored and supported by prominent businessman Frankie Wilson, with whom he maintains a close personal and business relationship. End Summary

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THOU DARE NOT CROSS THE RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP
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(2) (C) As reported ref. B, the conventional wisdom holds that former Freedom National Movement (FNM) Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham sealed his fate by displaying arrogance towards the religious leadership. The electorate in The Bahamas is devout, and the church leaders refused to remain silent after the former PM had expressed views antithetical to religious conservatives, such as welcoming to port a cruise liner catering to gay clientele and advocating for constitutional reform targeted toward improving women's rights. Ellis continued along this line, claiming that Ingraham is not religious and is definitely "not a man of God," even if he does attend church. However, nor does Ellis regard current Prime Minister Perry Christie as a "true man of God," although he feels that the PM is trying to be religious. Ellis then described a strange ritual (reported similarly ref. A) whereby Christie sought a meeting with Ellis over a several week period as he was gearing up his election campaign. Ellis kept rebuffing the PM's request, offering him only a 10 minute slot. Finally, however, Ellis offered the PM the opportunity to travel with him on a religious speaking tour in the U.S., promising that if the PM attended three of his sermons, he would be available to counsel the PM throughout the tour. Thus, the two men spent many intense hours together, during which time Ellis looked into the PM's soul and concluded that the PM has religious inclinations, but is "not yet there." Though the PM is not one of Ellis's regular parishioners, since the last election, he attends from time to time, as do all but three cabinet ministers.

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MOUNT TABOR BAPTIST CHURCH -- A TRULY REMARKABLE INSTITUTION
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(3) (U) Launched by a then very young Bishop Ellis from scratch in the late 1980's, Mount Tabor is now a thriving community of more than 7,000 members, including more than 500 who tithe. The church supports a wide range of missions and scholarship programs in The Bahamas, in the United States, and in Africa. The Church has a full-time staff of 27, including two who manage its insurance and banking businesses. During his adolescence, Bishop Ellis received encouragement and financial support from maverick businessman Frankie Wilson, with whom he lived in for 14 years. Wilson is now a leader in the Bahamian insurance industry which underwrites a branch in Ellis's parish. The church compound also houses a cooperative bank. Both are exclusively for church members. Ellis claims that his members pay the guaranteed lowest premiums for insurance products in The Bahamas.

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COMMENT
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(4) (U) Bishop Ellis is certainly a player in the local political scene. He also very much enjoys life in the limelight as he recalls visits with prominent local politicians and local and international celebrities. He knows how to weave names into discussions without crossing the line into arrogance. While he and other religious

leaders continue to claim credit for Christie's dramatic victory in the last election, this claim may be overstated. Ingraham had been in power for 10 years, and given his autocratic style, he had ruffled many feathers. Nevertheless, in the current context, political leaders seem to have learned their lessons as they increasingly pay homage to religious leaders, such as Bishop Ellis.

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